

## Appendix D. Data Quality

Two principal determinants of the quality of data collected in household surveys are the magnitude of the imputed responses and the accuracy of the responses that are provided. This appendix provides information on the imputation rates for items in the "Support for Nonhousehold Members" module in the Survey of Income and Program Participation, covers some of the problems encountered in collecting financial assistance data for children of the respondents, and evaluates the quality of spousal support payments from SIPP.

Imputed responses refer either to missing responses for specific questions or "items" in the questionnaire or to responses rejected in the editing procedure because of improbable or inconsistent answers. An example of the latter is a never-married respondent who reports making support payments to an ex-spouse.

The estimates in this report are produced after all items have been edited and imputed whenever necessary. Missing or inconsistent responses to specific questions are assigned a value in the imputation phase of the data processing operation. The procedure used to assign or impute most responses for missing or inconsistent data for SIPP is commonly referred to as the "hot deck" imputation method. This process assigns item values reported in the survey by respondents to nonrespondents. The respondent from whom the value is taken is called the "donor." Values from donors are assigned by controlling for demographic and economic data available for both donors and nonrespondents. The control variables used for this module's items generally included the respondent's age, sex, race, marital status, and monthly household income.

**Imputation rates.** Imputation rates for this supplement (items 18a-18j in the questionnaire shown in appendix F) are shown in table D-1. For all adult respondents age 18 years and over, the imputation rates are calculated by dividing the number of missing or inconsistent responses by the total number of responses that should have been provided based on the pattern of responses to prior questions.

In general, the level of imputation for support questions concerning children of the respondent under age 21 was about 5 to 6 percent. Imputation of items related to the support of adults was also quite low for the first mentioned adult (4 percent), but quite high for any subsequent mentioned adults (17 percent). The imputation rates on the amount of financial support provided

**Table D-1. Imputation Rates for Items on Support for Nonhousehold Members**

Question	Unweighted number of cases	Percent of responses imputed
18a. Were support payments made to someone outside the household?..	33,449	3.7
18b. Were any payments made for children under 21?.....	1,201	5.3
18c. Number of children payments made to .....	830	6.0
18d. Amount of child support .....	830	6.5
18e. Among persons supporting children are payments made to support others?.....	830	6.0
18f. How many other persons supported?	437	4.6
18g. Relationship of first person supported.....	437	3.7
Relationship of second person supported .....	75	17.3
18h. Living arr. of first person supported. Living arr. of second person supported.....	437	4.3
.....	75	17.3
18i. Amount of support for first person.. Amount of support for second person .....	437	12.6
.....	75	28.0
18j. Amount of support for all other persons .....	16	43.8

for children (6.5 percent) was lower than the rates for the adult support items (from 12.6 to 43.8 percent).

An evaluation of the quality of the responses in SIPP is limited because of the general lack of data sets on interhousehold income transfer at the national level. Wherever appropriate in the text of this report, comparisons have been made with Current Population Survey estimates, statistics from the Internal Revenue Service, and relevant modules on spousal support in SIPP to evaluate the level and amount of child and spousal support payments.

**Definitional problems.** Estimates of the incidence and amount of payments made to children under 21 years of age presented special problems. Ideally, the survey sought to record financial payments made to children living outside the household, including, but not limited to child support payments resulting from a divorce or separation. The phrase "child support," however, has a

very specific connotation in American society, usually implying some legal obligation to make payments.

Interviewers were instructed to explain to the respondents that child support was also to include payments of a voluntary nature, i.e., a couple helping out their child with his or her living expenses. As discussed in the text, estimates of child support (in its broadest sense) paid by men were almost identical to the incidence of child support (in its narrowest sense) received by women from children of absent fathers (about 4,000,000 male providers and female recipients). This implies that SIPP estimates of the number of males providing any other type of financial assistance to their children living elsewhere, not resulting solely from a marital disruption, is probably low and that there may have been some confusion on the part of the respondents in interpreting the phrase child support. Subsequent modules beginning with the 1988 SIPP panel will attempt to further clarify the semantical problems associated with the collection of these data.

**Comparisons among surveys.** Data on payments from men in support of children and spouses or ex-spouses from the SIPP, and on support payments received by women from the SIPP and from the Current Population Survey (CPS) are presented in table D-2. The SIPP collected information on payments made by men in a supplement to the fifth interview of the 1984 panel. Information on child support and alimony payments received by women was collected in each interview of SIPP and additional information on child support agreements with absent fathers was collected in the fifth interview supplement. The CPS collected information on the receipt by women of support payments for children and spouses or ex-spouses in the March-April

1984 and March-April 1986 interviews of CPS. The SIPP data reported by men providers of child support and alimony and those reported by women recipients are consistent. The number of men who reported supported payments for children (4.0 million) and the level of payments (\$2,694 annually were approximately the same as the number and level of child support payments reported by women recipients (4.0 million and \$2,506, respectively).

Data from the CPS provide a complementary profile of mothers receiving child support and alimony payments during calendar year 1985. In table D-2, CPS data on recipients of child support and alimony are compared to SIPP data on the number and amount of support provided by men for children and separated or divorced spouses. While there are some conceptual and methodological differences between these surveys, in general the CPS and SIPP results are consistent. The CPS estimates a lower number of women receiving child support (3.0 million in 1983 and 3.2 million in 1985) than the SIPP estimate for men providing financial support for children (4.0 million). This is in part because the CPS has a more restrictive universe: women 18 years and over receiving payments from the most recent divorce or separation and never-married women receiving child support. The CPS estimate excludes from the universe women receiving child support other than from the most recent divorce or separation and women who were never married at the time their children were born and who later married. The SIPP universe, however, includes all men providing support for children regardless of whether the women recipients have remarried more than one time; it also includes financial assistance to children under 21 years of age.

**Table D-2. Annual Financial Support Payments and Family Income, by Type of Provider and Recipient**

(SIPP Wave 5 1984 Panel and March-April 1984 and March-April 1986 Current Population Survey (CPS). Amounts in constant 1984 dollars)

Type of provider and recipient	Number of persons (thous.)	Amount paid		Family income	
		Mean	Standard error	Mean	Standard error
<b>Men Making Support Payments, SIPP 1984</b>					
Payments for child support.....	4,001	\$2,694	\$117	\$33,863	\$1,858
Payments to separated or ex-wives.....	553	5,999	994	54,033	8,413
<b>Women Receiving Support Payments, SIPP 1984</b>					
Payments for child support.....	4,017	2,506	117	23,545	1,111
<b>Women Receiving Support Payments, CPS 1983</b>					
Payments of child support .....	3,037	2,441	101	24,351	544
Payments from separated or ex-spouses .....	608	4,145	345	(NA)	(NA)
<b>Women Receiving Support Payments, CPS 1985</b>					
Payments for child support.....	3,243	2,138	59	25,482	567
Payments from separated or ex-spouses .....	616	3,604	284	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not available.

Source: SIPP Wave 5, 1984 Panel and Current Population Reports, Series P-23, Nos. 148 and 152.

In addition to the number of providers, the level of payments are also consistent between the surveys. In SIPP, providers reported average payments of \$2,690, compared with \$2,441 in 1983 and \$2,138 in 1985 reported by women in CPS. The SIPP estimate is larger because support in CPS is more a money income concept than an expenditure concept as in SIPP. Therefore, the SIPP estimate includes support payments which do not go directly to an ex-spouse (such as home mortgage or car payments) which are not counted in the CPS estimate.

Data in table D-2 show that an estimated 553,000 men provided some regular financial assistance to their ex-wives or to their current wives living in another household. Corresponding statistics from the CPS indicate that 608,000 and 616,000 women received alimony or maintenance payments during calendar years 1983 and 1985, numbers not statistically different from the SIPP estimate. However, support payments by men to wives or ex-wives averaged \$5,999 in SIPP, which are statistically different from the \$4,145 and \$3,604 estimates from the CPS for 1983 and 1985.